EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

ORGANIZER INFORMATION

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PANEL DESCRIPTION

Educational technology enthusiasts portray today as a utopia in the making. Modern computer technology, they assert, will bring information to the masses who can then use widely available knowledge to boot-strap themselves out of poverty and take their place in a meritocracy of information workers. Yet, as historians of technology, we know that the internet is only the latest in a line of teaching technologies. Even before MOOCs came and went from the world's stage, radio, television, and early computer systems, to mention a few, have all heralded a coming educational future. This panel seeks participants who unearth the origins of the "information age" by looking into the history of educational technology and its persistent promise to reach and teach the masses.

The idea for this panel takes inspiration from Ronald Kline's recent book, *The Cybernetic Moment*, which brilliantly traces the origins of "the information age" to scientists in the early years of the Cold War. These men and women sought to turn keywords such as "information," "feedback," and "control" into a universal science that spanned disciplines as disparate as electrical engineering and anthropology. The machines these scientists built turned their metaphors of information, feedback and control into concrete realities.[1]

Kline's book focuses in on early computers and communication systems. My own contribution to this panel will look at how cybernetic ideas went into the development of the PLATO computer-based instruction system (programmed logic for automated teaching operations). PLATO developed into a commercial enterprise from the late 1960s until the 1980s, during a time of student rebellions on college campuses and public perception of violence in inner cities. The company which sold PLATO, the Control Data Corporation, focused its efforts on these markets. To Control Data, PLATO held the promise of offering individualized instruction to students and a means to quell the social unrest of the era. In seeking to manage learning and social upheaval, PLATO forms an important antecedent to today's learning management systems.

This panel need not limit itself to computer systems or cybernetics, however. All contributions which look at the history of educational technology – regardless of era or geographic region – are welcome.

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[1] Ronald R. Kline, *The Cybernetics Moment: Or Why We Call Our Age the Information Age*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).